



# When to Refer

A person's mental health impacts three areas of life: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

These three areas in turn affect a person's relationships with God and others.

Mental health also has an impact upon a person's cognitive/perceptual ability, which includes the ability to understand oneself.

As we encourage our members who have physical needs to seek medical help for them, so we also encourage our members who have mental health needs to seek pastoral and professional help.

## **Understand Your Member**

Listen carefully to your member's description of what they are experiencing. Be sensitive to the mental health needs of your member and take action as soon as possible. Though you should become familiar with indicators of mental health needs, never claim to be the expert in treating a mental health illness. Never diagnose a mental health need.

- ▶ Diagnosing may cause your member to lose confidence in you.
- ▶ Diagnosing may cause legal problems for you.

## **When to Refer**

You should refer when you:

- ▶ Suspect a mental illness and feel you are involved with something you do not understand and are untrained to work with.
- ▶ Do not have the amount of time necessary to work with the emotional and physical areas of your member's mental health need.
- ▶ Have tried a number of things and none of them has worked.
- ▶ See a need to refer a person to a professional for emotional or physical help because you desire to focus on the spiritual needs of your member.

## “Who” and “How” to Refer to a Mental Health Professional

Know the mental health professional to whom the referral is being made. Use other available materials from the Committee on Mental Health Needs. These include:

- ▶ Ask a Therapist
- ▶ A Brief Review of Counseling Models
- ▶ Christian or Non-Christian Counselor?

Ask your member to grant written releases to you and to his or her mental health professional, so that you and the counselor may confer about your member.

Obtain an explanation of your member's issues. You and the counselor, in collaboration with your member, would develop a plan that would identify what each would be doing to help.

Demand respect for your use of God's Word on the part of the mental health professional, even if he or she does not believe in his Word.

Many WELS therapists are now providing professional counseling services through a live, secure video connection. Members may be able to meet with a counselor conveniently right from their own home. Contact WELS Special Ministries for referral information for video-assisted counseling.

Stay in touch with the counselor. You should be aware when your member quits seeing the mental health professional.

Consult with the mental health professional before finding fault.

## Ongoing Encouragement and Service to Your Member

Listen to your member. Pray for the member and others impacted by the mental illness. Continue to serve their spiritual needs. Speak Law and Gospel clearly and apply it carefully, remaining sensitive to the needs of someone who is suffering from a mental health illness. Encourage them to stay in touch with the Means of Grace. Expect Christian morality and empower it with the Gospel. Encourage your member as he or she grows in sanctified living.



Keep your member's mental illness in confidence unless they have given you permission to speak to someone about it. (This includes not speaking to your spouse without the member's permission.) Provide support and encouragement to family members and/or friends without compromising confidentiality. Encourage the member to cooperate with their mental health professional. Encourage the member to take their prescribed medications regularly.

### For further information

Go to [wels.net/mental-health](http://wels.net/mental-health).

See other brochures in this series at [csm.welsrc.net/download-csm/mental-health-needs/](http://csm.welsrc.net/download-csm/mental-health-needs/).

- ▶ Ask a Therapist (questions to use when choosing a therapist)
- ▶ A Brief Review of Counseling Models
- ▶ Christian or Non-Christian Counselor?

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### WELS Committee on Mental Health Needs

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